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# HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAMS



## MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Office of the Massachusetts Secretary of State  
Michael J. Connolly, Secretary

712/248

*Public Garden Bridge, Boston*  
*Photo by Sandra A. Curro*

# MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION



*Superior Courthouse,  
Newburyport*

**T**

he continuing presence of historic properties in Massachusetts immeasurably enhances the quality of our lives; they help to establish our sense of place and to define the very character of our communities.

To meet the challenge of preserving this important heritage, the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) was established by the legislature in 1963\* to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth.

The Commission consists of 18 members appointed from various disciplines who serve as the

State Review Board for state and federal preservation programs.

The professional staff of the Commission includes historians, architects, archaeologists, geographers, and preservation planners. The state's preservation programs, as described in this brochure, are administered through MHC's Preservation Planning, Grants, Public Information, and Technical Services Divisions.

The MHC is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer, as well as the office of the State Archaeologist.

*\*(MGL Ch. 9 Sections 27-32 enabling legislation)*

## PRESERVATION PLANNING DIVISION

*Since its inception in 1963, MHC has worked closely with local preservation groups. The majority of the communities in the Commonwealth now benefit from preservation programs. The Preservation Planning staff is responsible for assisting and encouraging local groups to become strong advocates for historic preservation planning.*

### Survey

The first step in a community's preservation planning process is to identify, describe and locate buildings, structures, objects, areas, burial grounds, landscape features, and sites that are of historical, architectural, or archaeological importance to the community, the state, or the nation. A comprehensive inventory of a town's historical assets serves as the basis for all future preservation activities. This inventory becomes part of a statewide inventory and enables MHC staff and local preservationists to make consistent and informed preservation decisions. MHC maintains a statewide survey at the reconnaissance level in order to formulate a broad context for evaluating the significance of historic and prehistoric properties.

Presently the MHC is entering the statewide inventory into the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), an interactive computerized database. MACRIS provides better access to the information on these files.



*Colonial Beacon Gas Station, Woburn*

### Local Historical Commissions

Established by a vote of the town or city government, a Local Historical Commission\* (LHC) is the municipal agency responsible for ensuring that preservation concerns are considered in community planning and development decisions. Over 340 LHCs across Massachusetts are already established and working closely with the MHC. They serve as local preservation advocates and as an important resource for information about their community's cultural resources and preservation activities.

*\*(MGL Ch. 40 Section 8d)*



## ***Certified Local Government Program***

The Certified Local Government Program\* (CLG) is a unique partnership that provides a close integration of federal, state, and local preservation activities. Communities that have enacted historic preservation legislation are eligible to apply to MHC for certification. By extending state and federal programs at the local level, the CLG program allows communities to participate directly in the review and approval of National Register nominations. CLGs are eligible to compete for at least 10 percent of the federal funds allocated to MHC.

*\*(National Historic Preservation Act of 1980, 36 CFR Part 61)*



*Ames Free Public Library, North Easton*



*Shaker Village, Tyringham*

## ***Local Historic Districts***

A Local Historic District\* (LHD) is established and administered by a community to protect the distinctive characteristics of important areas, and to encourage new structural designs that are compatible with the area's historic setting. A District Study Committee is appointed to conduct a survey of the area and to prepare a preliminary report for local and state review. A final report is then submitted to the local governing body for approval of the local historic district ordinance or by-law. Once a LHD is established, a Local Historic District Commission (LHDC) is appointed to review all applications for exterior changes to properties within the district. This design review process assures that changes to properties will not detract from the district's historic character. Review criteria are determined by each city and town and vary for each local district.

*\*(MGL Ch. 40C)*

## National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places\* (NRHP) documents and records the nation's important and irreplaceable buildings, sites, structures, objects, and districts worthy of protection. Based on local and state surveys, nominations to the NRHP are generally initiated by the local historical commission, which works with MHC staff to prepare the form. Nominations are then reviewed by the MHC State Review Board at a public meeting and forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register for approval.

Listing on the NRHP recognizes the value of our nation's historical and cultural heritage and provides a basis for making informed planning and development decisions. NRHP status places no constraints on what owners may do with their property when using private funding. While the NRHP is not a design review program, it does provide limited protection from state and federal actions, as well as eligibility for matching state and federal restoration and research grants (when

available) and certain federal tax benefits for certified rehabilitation projects.

*\*(National Historic Preservation Act, 36 CFR Part 60)*



*Hunnewell Cottage, Wellesley*



*Choate Bridge, Ipswich*

## State Register of Historic Places

The State Register of Historic Places\* (SRHP) was created to serve as a master list of designated historic properties in the Commonwealth and to provide an added measure of protection to these properties. Properties are included on the State Register if they are: listed in or determined eligible for listing in the NRHP; within local historic districts; local, state, and national landmarks; state archaeological landmarks; or properties with preservation restrictions. The SRHP serves as a guide for developers and state agencies in order to determine whether a state funded, permitted, or licensed project will affect historic properties. The State Register review process was modeled closely after the federal review process (outlined under the Technical Services Division section of this brochure), and ensures that State Register properties will not inadvertently be harmed by activities supported by state agencies.

*\*(MGL Ch. 9 Sections 26-27C, as amended)*



Rider Tavern,  
Charlton

## GRANTS DIVISION

*Economic incentives for historic preservation and rehabilitation serve to stimulate research and preserve our historic properties. The MHC administers a federal grants-in-aid program for survey and planning projects as well as a state matching grant program for restoration, rehabilitation, and research of properties listed in the State Register. When funds are available, reimbursement grants are awarded annually through a competitive application process.*

### **Survey and Planning Grants**

Survey and Planning Grants provide 50 percent matching federal funds for the preparation of community surveys, preservation plans, preparation of historic district studies and legislation, archaeological surveys, nominations to the National Register, and educational preservation programs.

Eligible applicants are local historical commissions, Certified Local Governments, local and state agencies, educational institutions, and private organizations.



## ***Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund***

In years when the Commonwealth authorizes funds, monies are available for the restoration, rehabilitation, stabilization, and documentation of historic and archaeological properties owned by municipalities or nonprofit organizations. Through the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund\*, 50 percent matching grants are available to qualifying properties listed on the State Register to ensure their physical preservation.

A highlight of this unique program, the first of its kind in the nation, is the option applicants have to apply for up to 75 percent of the total project cost if they are willing to commit an additional 25 percent toward an endowment fund for long-range preservation and maintenance of the property.

Scopes of work for projects range from the acquisition of an endangered property, to the restoration of an historic building, to research projects such as historic structures reports, archaeological data recovery projects, or study of innovative preservation techniques.

*\*(MGL Ch. 9 Section 27A)*

## ***Preservation Restrictions***

Preservation Restrictions\* protect historic and archaeological properties from changes that may be inappropriate. A Preservation Restriction (easement) on a property restricts present and future owners from altering a specified portion of that building, structure, or site. A restriction can run for a few years or in perpetuity and may be included as part of the property deed. Preserva-

tion restrictions can be donated or purchased by a government body or private preservation organization and are enforced by the holder of the restriction.

Charitable donations of easements on historical buildings or archaeological sites may qualify for federal income tax deductions.

*\*(MGL Ch. 184 Sections 31-33)*



*Boston Lighthouse, Little Brewster Island, Boston*



## PUBLIC INFORMATION DIVISION

Through the MHC's public information program, the preservation community and general public is kept up to date on all new preservation policies, laws, programs, and activities. A quarterly newsletter, covering significant preservation developments, related local, state, and national news, as well as events taking place in the preservation community, is published by the Public Information Division. In addition, technical information is available through a number of MHC publications. MHC staff members are available to speak about preservation issues and related topics at workshops and conferences. To augment the awareness of preservation activities in the Commonwealth, MHC sponsors an annual Preservation Awards ceremony during Preservation Month, which honors outstanding preservation achievements. The Public Information Division also organizes and hosts various local events commemorating National Register designations across the Commonwealth.



*Hopkinton Supply Company, Framingham*



*Aldrich Mill, Granby*

## TECHNICAL SERVICES DIVISION

*The Technical Services Division staff provide a wide range of technical preservation assistance to public agencies, communities, and the public.*

### *Historic Preservation Certification*

The federal tax incentive program\* has encouraged private investment and rehabilitation of historic properties and has been particularly valuable to Massachusetts. This program allows owners of National Register buildings in commercial, industrial, or rental residential uses to qualify for a 20 percent Investment Tax Credit, in effect a 20 percent rebate, based on rehabilitation costs. These credits help pay for the unique costs associated with rehabilitations of historic properties and have convinced otherwise skeptical investors of the value of historic buildings.

The National Park Service certifies rehabilitation, and the MHC Technical Services staff advises and assists owners during the application and review process. This assistance has inspired tremendous interest in the program in Massachusetts and has ensured a consistently high rate of approvals.

Applications should be submitted to MHC before rehabilitation work begins in order to receive the most useful advice and best results.

*\*(Tax Reform Act of 1986)*



*24-26 Summer Street., Lawrence  
Tax Act Project — before and after*

## *Environmental Review and Public Planning*

As the State Historic Preservation Office, the MHC acts as liaison to federal, state, and local development agencies such as the Federal Highway Administration, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Massachusetts Industrial Finance Agency. The MHC is authorized by state and federal law\* to review and comment on certain state and federally licensed, permitted, or funded projects to determine whether or not the proposed project will have an impact on historic or prehistoric properties. This review process generally begins during the early stage of the planning process when the federal or state agency contacts the MHC. If it is determined that the project poses a threat to a historic property within the proposed project impact area, then project proponents and the MHC jointly explore alternatives to eliminate, minimize, or mitigate any damaging effects. MHC's environmental review programs have been successful in resolving historic preservation disputes.

Archaeological excavations on public lands are overseen by the State Archaeologist\*, whose permits ensure that these important resources are properly conserved. The State Archaeologist also reviews development projects that affect archaeological properties and negotiates solutions to protect the sites.

*\*(NHPA Section 106; 36 CFR 800)*

*\*(MGL Ch. 9 Sections 26-27C, as amended; 950 CMR 71.00,  
950 CMR 70.00)*



*Brona Simon, State  
Archaeologist, and Edward Bell,  
Staff Archaeologist, Hudson  
Poor Farm Cemetery, Hudson*

*Kresge Auditorium,  
MIT, Cambridge*

## **Massachusetts Historical Commission**

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*Milk Bottle Dairy Bar,  
Taunton*

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